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NOTES BY GENERAL EISENHOWER ON LUNCHEON MEETING,
APRIL 22, 1961, WITH PRESIDENT KENNEDY AT CAMP DAVID.

(I talked with Allen Dulles the previous day, at the President's
suggestion.)

Mr. Kennedy met me when I landed from the helicopter
at Camp David. We went to the terrace at Aspen Cottage to talk.
He began by outlining the Cuban situation, including a description
of the planning, the objectives and the anticipated results. This
outline agreed exactly with that given me by Allen Dulles yesterday
morning.

He explained in detail where things began to go awry and
stated that the whole operation had become a complete failure.
Apparently some men are still hiding in the "bosque" and possibly
have made their way to the mountains. Apparently about 400
prisoners were taken.

The chief apparent causes of failure were gaps in our
intelligence, plus what may have been some errors in ship loading,
timing, and tactics.

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It appears that too much specialized equipment was carried in a single ship and, when this ship was damaged, the troops on the beach were left fairly helpless. I inquired whether or not the troops had had the equipment immediately with them (in platoons and companies) to establish effective road blocks on the three avenues of entry into the swamp area. He was under the impression that this equipment was properly distributed and the troops well trained in its use. Therefore the reason for the quick penetration of the swamp into the vulnerable beachhead was unknown.

The press has mentioned a great deal about MIGs. The President is not certain, and neither was Allen Dulles, that these were MIGs. They could easily have been T-33s, equipped with rockets and guns; but, at least, they shot down a number of our airplanes and apparently operated effectively against our troops in the beachhead.

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He is having General Taylor come to Washington to analyze all phases of the operation, including all of the planning and the methods so as to see whether there are lessons to be learned. He has the feeling that we can be faced with some similar situation over the next decade and thinks we should do our best to be prepared to meet it. (He did not say that this report would be made public -- but I did get the impression that it would.)

The next thing that he wanted to talk about were the direction and prospects for future action. I was unable to give him any detailed suggestions, but did say that I would support anything that had as its objective the prevention of Communist entry and solidification of bases in the Western hemisphere.

He believes that the two great powers have now neutralized each other in atomic weapons and inventories; but that in numbers of troops, and our exterior communications as opposed to the interior communications of the Communists, we are relatively weak.

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He did not seem to think that our great seapower counteracted this situation completely.

The only real suggestion I could give him regarding the Western Hemisphere was to do his very best to solidify the OAS against Communism, including a readiness to support, at least morally and politically, any necessary action to expel Communist penetration. I said that this was something that had to be worked on all the time. I told him, also, that I believed the American people would never approve direct military intervention, by their own forces, except under provocations against us so clear and so serious that everybody would understand the need for the move.

The President did not ask me for any specific advice. I contented myself with merely asking a few questions about the tactical action, including the timing of the support that I understood the Navy Air had given to the landings. He said that in the first instance they were so anxious to keep the United States hand concealed that they accorded no such support, and when they finally did get word

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of its need it was too late. This situation was complicated by the fact that all communications went out. I understood that the communication equipment was on the ship that sank, but this is hard to believe because each unit carries some light communication equipment, including the ability to send radiograms to a distance of some fifty to a hundred miles.

There are certainly factors, now unknown, that will finally come to light under searching scrutiny. The purpose of this scrutiny is not to find any scapegoat, because the President does seem to take full responsibility for his own decision, but rather to find and apply lessons for possible future action.

* * * *

The President brought up Laos. He outlined the situation and said that the British were very reluctant to participate in any military intervention and of course the French positively refused to do so. He thinks that both the British and the French would like to see Souvanna Phouma brought back to power as the only man

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who could possibly maintain and sustain a neutral position in Laos. (As I remember, our own general opinion, which we had formed before January 20th, was that Souvanna Phouma had gone so far toward the Soviets that he could scarcely extract himself from their clutches.)

The President was quite sure that there was no possibility of saving Laos by unilateral military action. Consequently he looked forward to a ceasefire, which is promised for this coming Monday, the 24th. He remarked that he was not so much concerned about Laos as Thailand. I replied that, in that event, it would seem the part of wisdom to begin immediately the strengthening of the Thai forces and positions. My former reports led me to believe that the Thai might be very sturdy soldiers whereas obviously the Laotians didn't like to fight. I asked him whether the ICC was to be allowed, coincidentally with the ceasefire, to survey the whole country and see exactly what the situation was. He said our people would insist upon that.

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Again I told him that from my own position I could not offer any advice -- I could just say that as a generality in order to keep your position strong at the conference table you had constantly to let the enemy see that our country was not afraid. We believe in what is right and attempt to insist upon it.

* * * *

Quite naturally a conversation such as this had no definite conclusion. We talked throughout most of the luncheon, and afterward strolled through the camp and continued discussing various aspects of each situation, but nothing of a dramatic character came up.

Finally we met with a group of newspaper reporters and photographers in front of Aspen Cottage. I enjoyed meeting so many of my old friends among the crowd. He made a very short statement and said that he had just outlined for me the situations in these two parts of the world and had asked for my counsel. Nothing else was said.

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When the reporters turned to me I said that it was rather fun to be in the position of not having to make a statement and having nothing to say. They then asked me whether I supported him. I repeated a generalization that I had expressed on other occasion: -- that when it came to problems of foreign operations, then an American traditionally stands behind the Constitutional head, the President.

This of course was said with respect to purposes; no one outside government is committed to support details of timing, tactics, selection of operation sites and methods. These are not even yet known to outsiders.

After all this, he took me in his car to the heliport and suggested a golf game in the near future. Dick Flehr was driving and John Campion was riding in the front seat.

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